



SafeLives Dash risk checklist

Frequently asked questions

The introduction of the new checklist has raised a number of practical questions about its use. We have attempted to address some of these below. However, we anticipate that more will become evident as the tool is used more widely in the coming months. We therefore plan to update these FAQs as appropriate. Please visit www.safelives.org.uk/practitioner_resources/riskresources.htm to be sure that you have the latest version.

What is the Dash risk checklist for?

The purpose of the checklist is to give a consistent and simple to use tool to practitioners who work with victims of domestic abuse in order to help them identify those who are at high risk of harm and whose cases should be referred to a MARAC meeting in order to manage the risk.

Who should use it?

We believe that the primary audience will be front line practitioners working with victims of domestic abuse who are represented at MARAC. This will include both domestic abuse specialists such as IDVAs and generic practitioners such as those working in a primary care health service or housing.

Over time an increasing range of agencies will feel confident to use the checklist with their clients or service users. The checklist has been designed with this goal in mind and the practice guidance aims to support those practitioners who are perhaps less confident in addressing the questions contained within it.

When should the Dash risk checklist be used?

The Dash should be used whenever a practitioner receives an initial disclosure of domestic abuse. As you will be aware, risk in domestic abuse situations is dynamic and can change very quickly. Thus it may be appropriate to review the checklist with a client on more than one occasion. It is designed to be used for those suffering current rather than historic domestic abuse and ideally would be used close in time to the last incident of abuse that somebody has suffered.

Why should one use it?

Using an evidence based risk identification tool increases the likelihood of the victim being responded to appropriately and therefore of addressing the risks they face. The Dash risk checklist gives practitioners common criteria and a common language of risk.

Do I have to ask every question?

Yes. It is important that we get a comprehensive view of the risks that somebody suffers. Without this, there is a danger that one may overlook something significant in a case which causes an agency's response to be inadequate.

Is this now the same as the police version?

The two models of the risk identification checklist and the risk assessment and management tool used by the police are now completely aligned and are based on the same analysis and approach. However, there are practical differences in the responsibility held by police officers and the risk tool for police is more extensive covering a full risk assessment and risk management information pack as well as three additional questions which clarify the situation in relation to children. If you have further questions about the police model, please contact your local force champion or Staff Officer ACPO DA National 01380 734035.

Can you explain the referral thresholds included in the guidance?

There is a detailed explanation of the referral thresholds in the new risk identification document but they are based on three principles.

- Firstly, we know that in many cases it will be necessary for professionals to use their judgement as to the risk that a victim faces although completion of the checklist is essential in having an informed professional judgement. However, there will be situations where a victim either refuses to answer questions or answers only a very few but it is the professional's judgement that they are at high risk of harm.
- Conversely, there will be instances where a victim is prepared to answer the full range of questions and there we would recommend, based on our research, that a threshold of 14 ticks or above is a defensible position to take when referring a case to MARAC.
- Finally, there may be instances of escalation of violence where there are numerous 'smaller' incidents and this too can be a catalyst to taking a case to MARAC, sharing information and getting a better picture of the true situation.

In practice, domestic abuse experts will tend to rely on professional judgement combined with the actuarial threshold, while less experienced or specialist practitioners will use the actuarial threshold on its own.

What about cases that do not meet the threshold of 14 ticks?

Inevitably, there will be cases that fall just below the actuarial threshold where you as a practitioner have genuine concerns about a victim and here you have full discretion to use your professional judgement to refer them into the meeting.

In some areas IDVA services may have the capacity to take more referrals than simply the MARAC caseload. If this is the case, then we would suggest that taking referrals based on professional judgement of high risk or 'down to' 10 ticks on the new checklist would be an appropriate level based on the research that we have done to date. We would stress, however, that it is up to each individual service to take this decision and review it at regular intervals based on the caseload and referrals that they are receiving.

What is the Severity of Abuse Grid?

The severity of abuse grid is a tool that has been developed to help identify more precisely both the severity of risk that an individual faces and also how that risk changes over time.

It is particularly useful for IDVAs when they are opening a case with a client and also when closing a case in order to have some firm information on which to base this decision. There is full guidance on using the grid in the risk identification checklist pack.

How does the Checklist work in relation to 'honour'-based violence?

You will see that all of the questions now include the possibility that there is more than one perpetrator in a case thus giving victims the option of disclosing additional people who they are frightened of, or who they feel threatened by, in addition to an intimate partner. Further, there are direct questions about 'honour'-based violence in the checklist which will help practitioners to identify these cases.

It is important to stress that it is highly likely that you will need to use your professional judgement in identifying whether an 'honour'-based violence case should be referred to MARAC since much of the checklist covers wider criminal behaviour which may be absent in cases of 'honour'-based violence and thus they are unlikely to meet the actuarial threshold for referral.

The security issues around information sharing are particularly relevant in cases of 'honour'-based violence and the victim must ALWAYS be asked who it is safe to share information with.

Please note that during the piloting of the checklist it served to help identify a very small number of HBV cases. Any feedback about its use in relation to HBV from practitioners would be much appreciated.

How does the Checklist work in relation to stalking?

The checklist is designed for use in cases of intimate partner and wider family violence and thus is not appropriate for use in cases where stalking occurs and there has been no previous relationship.

We would recommend that in cases where stalking is identified that this is taken very seriously and that reference is made to the types of behaviour that are identified in the severity of abuse grid so that particularly high risk aspects of stalking are identified and dealt with where appropriate.

How does the Checklist work in relation to LGBT victims?

There is very little research on domestic abuse in relation to the LGBT community. However, we consulted with experts in this field and have included additional guidance about how to ask the questions and some of the additional barriers that may exist for reporting victims from these communities.

How does the Checklist work in relation to family violence?

The checklist can now be used in cases of intergenerational violence, such as an adult son abusing his mother, and should be completed and assessed in the same way as for an intimate partner case.

Who should be using the practice guidance?

The guidance as it stands today was drafted for use by Independent Domestic Violence Advisors. However, we believe that much of it would be relevant for ALL practitioners working with victims of domestic abuse, although the specific safety options which each agency could offer may differ.

How was the Checklist piloted?

The checklist was piloted extensively with three IDVA services, with three police forces and with a number of the partner agencies who attend the Blackpool MARAC. We integrated their feedback and are very grateful to them for their support in this work.

We were also able to cross reference our conclusions with work undertaken by Cafcass, Respect and Relate who had carried out a comprehensive evaluation of the previous checklist and who had identified a number of areas for development which we believe have now been addressed.

What about the children – can this Checklist be used in relation to children?

This checklist is designed to identify risk to an adult victim of domestic abuse. However, we know that children who are living with and witnessing domestic abuse are also at risk of suffering significant harm and this has recently been formalised by Section 120 of the Adoption & Children Act 2002. Thus, while this is not designed as a risk assessment tool for children, it is very likely to identify children who are at high risk of harm and who should be in receipt of additional support.

The checklist clearly asks now that every practitioner who fills this out in relation to an adult victim and is aware that there are children in that household must make a referral to ensure that those children are safeguarded. We are clear that without a risk identification tool for adults the safety of many children will be missed and that referrals need to be made where children are living in households where domestic abuse is taking place.

Where do the risk factors come from?

The risk factors included are drawn from extensive research by leading academics in the field into domestic homicides and 'near misses'. The research base for each factor can be found in the practice guidance.

What has changed since the last Risk Identification Checklist?

SafeLives has been working with the Association of Chief Police Officers, Cafcass and Respect to try and address some of the demands that are faced by practitioners when using a risk identification tool. These include:

- The need for a common understanding of risk.
- The need to address issues related to 'honour'-based violence.
- The need to address issues related to family violence.
- The need to address issues related to stalking.
- The need to address issues arising from concerns from LGBT victims.

The new checklist aims to address these and in addition all questions have been re-ordered and there is a very extensive practice guidance included.

Finally, we have developed a tool in partnership with IDVA services over the past three years which is known as the severity of abuse grid and this allows practitioners to get a clearer picture of the risks that somebody is facing when used in conjunction with the risk identification checklist.

What should I do if I have concerns about a victim's safety after I complete the checklist but it does not meet the threshold in my area for a multi-agency response?

You should signpost the victim to your local specialist domestic abuse service while reiterating the need to call the police in the event of a crisis.

SafeLives,

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